

## Original research papers

# MOTIVATIONS (FOR) AND OUTCOMES OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** Whereas changing roles and environments in sport industry create a need for the continued professional development of sport managers, there is a clear knowledge gap about the latter phenomenon. Therefore, the study aims to explore the sport managers' motivations for a continuing professional education experience and the outcomes of such an experience for their careers and the development of their organisations. **Material and methods.** Because of its exploratory nature, the study is based on the qualitative analysis of semi structured interviews with sport managers who have participated in one of the Polish editions of the UEFA Certificate in Football Management programme. **Results.** Sport managers share multiple extrinsic motivations (mainly of professional development and networking in football environment). In terms of the benefits for the managers' careers, there is an improvement in their career capital (mainly through the development in football specific knowing-how and knowing-whom), whereas the effects on career success are predominately subjective (improved perceived marketability). The benefits for the sport organisations are very heterogeneous, which results from substantial differences, mainly in learning culture and supervisor's support, among the organisations. **Conclusions.** The main contribution of the study is the exploration of the football and sport specific context of continuing professional education. The research offers some practical implications for stakeholders interested in fostering professionalization of sport industry.

**Key words:** continuing professional education, football, UEFA CFM, sport managers

### Introduction

The ongoing commercialisation of the sport industry has induced the organisational professionalization in the sector, which is observed in changes in governance, organisational structures and policy making [1]. These processes require not only constant adaptations to innovations on the part of managers responsible for the industry but also stimulate a need for their continuing professional development (CPD). In sport, as in many other industries, various forms of CPD are available for managers. They differ in terms of their formal structure, regularity, intensity, or focus, e.g.: in-service training (on the job), continuing professional training (conferences and workshops), continuing professional support (structures allowing for greater interaction between members of the profession), continuing professional education (larger courses incorporating theory and research-based knowledge). However, compared to other sectors, little is known about the scale or outcomes of CPD in sport management. In fact, abundant research concerning mainly teachers or medical personnel has proven a beneficial impact of CPD on the learners themselves – in terms of their career capital and success [2, 3] and the learners' work performance [4, 5, 6, 7] – both in subjective and objective terms. In the light of these findings, the researchers started to look into the incentives and barriers individuals may face when taking up the CPD [8, 9, 10,

11, 12, 13, 14], with a special focus on motivations to learn, which are considered, from the psychological perspective, to be the main predictor of adult learning [15]. One of the findings of this rich field of research is the suggestion that the outcomes of CPD are influenced by sectorial characteristics [16].

Given the knowledge gap regarding the CPD in sport management and the clear need for sport managers' professional development in order to adapt to the changing demands of the environment, this study undertakes to explore the subject of continuing professional education (CPE) in the context of the sport industry. In particular, the goal of this work is to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the sport managers' motivations to undertake CPE (RQ1)?
- 2) What are the outcomes of this experience for sport managers' careers (RQ2a) and for the development of their organisations (RQ2b) in the eyes of the sport managers themselves?

Because of the explorative nature of the study, a qualitative method (interviews with sport managers) was chosen for the investigation. In particular, the research concerns managers who obtained the UEFA Certificate in Football Management (UEFA CFM) in one of the Polish editions.

Currently, football is the most popular team sport in Poland (in terms of active and passive participation as well as sponsor-

ship). Its top division is clearly the most commercialized area in Polish sport, and as a big business (creating big emotions) requires the implementation of the most advanced professional management models (e.g.; to deal with broadcasters, transfers of players, organisation of big tournaments, digital communication, sport digital innovations, crises and security management). However, also in the other areas of football, such as semi-professional or amateur football clubs in lower divisions and non-profit organisations at the grass root level, the ongoing changes in fans' and clients' lifestyles and preferences, digitalisation of communication, needs for infrastructure modernisation and improvement in coaches qualifications, or competition for limited public resources, make the acquisition and a creative use of knowledge by managers a critical factor for the survival and for the development of the organisations [17]. This statement is particularly true in times of general economic hardship.

In the field of football management education, the achievements of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) are quite remarkable. Through its various academic programmes organised in 48 countries, UEFA has already trained over 2,000 individuals involved in the sport discipline on the professional level. Such an approach represents the vision of its president, Alexander Ceferin, who stated that "To navigate the complexities of modern football, national associations and their stakeholders need talented and well-trained employees and leaders" [18]. The UEFA CFM is a course directed at managers and employees of football associations and their stakeholders. More than one thousand participants obtained diplomas of successful completion of the studies. The first Polish edition of the programme began in December 2017, whereas the second one in September 2018. Over the nine-month period, students participated in three face-to-face seminars and in six online modules conducted by leading academics and football business experts. The programme addressed the following subject areas: the organisation of world football, strategic performance management, communication, the media and public relations, event and volunteer management. Apart from a comprehensive handbook and a web-based material, participants had access to the online library, which is a rich source of knowledge.

Given the context of the study, throughout the paper the term 'football manager' is used to refer to people working in various administrative positions in football organisations.

### Material and Method

The main research technique used in this study was a semi-structured interview with the football managers having participated in one of the Polish editions of the UEFA CFM course. The interview questionnaire consisted of five key parts: 1) motivations for participation in the course, 2) evaluation of the course, 3) benefits of the course for the manager's career, 4) outcomes of the course for the manager's football organisation, 5) attitude towards further CPE.

The process of selection of the respondents was guided by judgemental sampling, in an effort to ensure heterogeneity of the sample in relation to perceptions, positions and demographic backgrounds of the professionals. Two persons rejected the interview request, while four individuals did not reply to the request. Finally, seven persons from the pool of 33 participants of the second Polish edition of UEFA CFM course were interviewed. To guarantee their full anonymity, only their general characteristics may be presented. The respondents are between 26 and 46 years old, six of them are male. Three participants of the study come from countries other than Poland, while four are

Polish citizens. Four managers are employed in football clubs competing in two highest divisions in their respective countries, two work at national associations and one person works for another sport organisation. They have been involved in operational roles in various departments, including marketing, sponsorship or events, at their respective institutions. They have been professionally involved in sport for 4 to 16 years.

The interviews were conducted by phone and by internet communicators in April 2020 and lasted from 15 to 45 minutes (ca. 200 minutes in total). The interviewees were informed about the study purpose and granted full anonymity. They all agreed to recording of the interviews.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim into word documents. Subsequently, the thematic analysis of the text was applied. The analysis was guided by well-established models and concepts used in the area of CPD: for managers' motivations – Self Determination Theory [19] and Education Participation Scale [9], for outcomes for managers – career capital [20] and career success [21], for outcomes for organisations – training transfer [22]. Simultaneously, the analysis combined both deductive and inductive reasoning [23] in an effort to generate insights specific to the football management context. Interviews, their transcription and analysis as well as translation of the quotes from Polish into English were performed by the authors.

### Results

#### *Motivations to take part in the UEFA CFM course and attitudes towards future CPE*

All the respondents indicated multiple motivations to take part in the UEFA CFM course. These motivations were mainly extrinsic, goal oriented, with the main one being professional development (improving knowledge in football management), followed by that linked to the expansion of social contacts (networking in the football world). The less directly articulated was the intrinsic motivation of personal joy and satisfaction of learning.

In terms of sport specific motivations, an interesting point was made by Respondent 1, who – working in the sport department of a football club – wanted to understand the business side of his organisation. Moreover, there were also two clear, course specific motivations articulated: the prestige of the certificate achieved from the renowned organising institutions, and the international character of the course. Most of these motivations are clearly visible in the statement made by Respondent 7:

*I have decided to take part in the course in order to gain knowledge regarding the area of management in football organisations. The fact that the CFM was organised by UEFA in cooperation with the Polish Football Association certainly was an important factor, too. I was not only expecting to increase my knowledge but also to meet professionals working in football industry across the country and beyond. International character of the course made it even more attractive from my perspective. Having participated in international educational courses before, I expected yet another fantastic experience for my personal and also professional development. [R7]*

When asked about their intention towards future CPE experiences, respondents, in general, showed a positive, sometimes even enthusiastic attitude. Some of them had already participated in other sport management courses. However, their intent to gain another CPE experience is conditional and depends on the availability of time, funding, employer's permission, the geographical proximity of the face-to-face activities, and (last but not least) the objective benefits for their careers:

*If I were to invest in yet another course, I would have to see measurable benefits of this investment – e.g. in form of a promotion. I would not do it just for the academic knowledge anymore. At this stage of my career I cannot see a need for such an investment but, of course, education is very important, and I would recommend such courses to all those who wish to develop as professionals. [R4]*

### **Outcomes for the sport managers**

Most of the benefits of the course mentioned by the respondents both spontaneously and by answering more direct questions were linked to the work-related knowledge in football (so called knowing-how career capital), such as understanding of strategic and operational management, marketing, communication and PR, sponsorship, revenue generation, national and international structures of football organisations, organisation of big events or volunteer management. Importantly, the understanding of these specific fields of the football world allowed many of them to discover areas other than those that they were specialists in. Thus, they have a better understanding of the bigger picture not only of the football world but also of their own organisation:

*I have gained a better understanding of various departments at my organisation that I have not been working at before. I could much better comprehend the roles of different departments, such as the organisation of events, communication or PR. I have broadened my horizons. I have also learnt some tools used in those departments on a daily basis. [R4]*

On the other hand, the not football-specific competency gained in this particular course, of which the respondents were aware of, was an improved English language proficiency.

Other important benefits of the programme, as mentioned by many respondents, were new contacts that were made with both lecturers and other students. A direct contact with the academics was seen as particularly valuable experience; however, the respondents also praised the opportunity to learn from experiences of their fellow professionals. Moreover, networking with other participants was seen in some cases as a means for their career development at some point in the future. The newly established relations have been maintained at numerous occasions, on both national and international levels. In some cases, they resulted in joint projects that were successfully implemented on a professional level. From this perspective, the course was a chance to improve the knowing-whom element of career capital:

*During the course, it was one of my goals to get to know more and more people from different countries. To give an exact example, together with my colleagues I could visit a club in another country because during the course I met people from that country. We got to know each other, and they provided me with the opportunity to contact people from the club. I could get in touch with the club and to organise a study tour there. For me it was great. [R3]*

The course also improved the knowing-why career capital of some of the respondents, especially thanks to the more holistic vision of football they have got:

*Yes, now I have new ideas about how I can develop my career. (...) I have a better understanding of the industry. [R3]*

In addition, a job within the UEFA structures or in national federations became more interesting and more achievable from subjective viewpoints of participants:

*The course has broadened my mind. I have got an understanding of what the work in the national federation looks like. (...) I have got the motivation to work, as I realised that we are*

*not limited by anything and there are real possibilities to get a position in the association. [R4]*

The other knowing-why benefit of this particular course was an increased awareness of the other educational courses organised by UEFA and the intent to take part in one of them at some point in the future. Finally, the course also had a specific empowering effect on the female manager:

*The course showed me that there is place for women in European sport organisations. (...) I've been encouraged to continue my career in sport. [R5]*

In fact, the course has already helped one respondent to change their job (within an organisation) and made the others aware of various job opportunities in different sport organisations. Although it is not perceived as a game-changer in their careers, the respondents hope it has a positive impact on their situation on the job market – not only because of the new knowledge, skills and contacts they have got but also because of the diploma obtained from such a prestigious organisation as UEFA.

### **Outcomes for the sport organisation**

The interviews showed important heterogeneity in terms of the scale and scope of the course benefits that the sport managers use in their football organisations. In part, it is determined by the position they hold and the type of the department and the organisation they work in. In part, however, it is due to the apparent differences in the organisation culture as well as the supervisor's and peer support.

On the positive side, many respondents enjoyed the freedom to act and their direct supervisor's support to implement innovative ideas inspired by the course (e.g., introduction of the UEFA-like standardisation in the organisation of events, optimization in communications, implementation of a strategic plan for the development of a given department, modifications in the financial reporting system to increase the efficiency of the process). These respondents were positive about the impact of the course on their organisation:

*Obviously, the improved quality of my job has had a positive impact on the development of my organisation. It may not be visible at first glance but there is clearly an indirect positive impact. [R2]*

*I hope my work will affect the organisation in a positive way. (...) Now I do not have tools to evaluate the impact that my knowledge and my work have on the organisation but I believe it will have good effects. I am sure it will. [R1]*

Simultaneously, however, some other respondents showed signs of discontent due to fairly limited possibilities to implement their newly possessed skills and to make significant changes in the organisation. The main barrier seems to be a low degree of learning culture in some of the organisations:

*Nobody was interested in the course content and in what could be implemented. Unfortunately, people were resistant to change and innovation. [R5]*

*My immediate boss and the CEO supported me during the course. But after the course I am not sure if they thought it might have a big impact on the organisation. It had a great impact on me, though. [R3]*

This kind of a pessimistic response was often accompanied by a general poor opinion of the management quality in the organisation, especially at the executive level. Nevertheless, all the respondents had positive feelings regarding the application of their skills now or at some point in the future. All of them agreed about the utility of this kind of programmes for the development of the national football – irrespective of their country of origin.



## Discussion

This explorative research has allowed for some initial insights into the phenomena in the CPE of football managers. The most interesting findings are those that are generalizable beyond the specific case of the UEFA CFM course.

With respect to the first research question, it was found that football managers share multiple extrinsic motivations, which possess certain football specific traits. In particular, the professional enhancement motivation was restricted to management in football (although it was larger than a manager's job specialisation in football). The motivation to extend a professional network, on the other hand, was often paired with the opinions that there is a limited number of professionals in football business, so they should get to know their counterparts, for mutual benefit. Interestingly, in this research no cases of incentives coming from the managers' organisations were registered. Even though in many cases the managers were supported in their participation in the course (or at least not hindered), they were not pushed towards it by their organisations (in forms of an obligation, possible promotion or a salary increase).

In fact, these somehow restricted (mostly autonomous) motivations turn out to be quite realistic – the managers in the sample have not enjoyed either promotions or a salary increase as a result of the course so far. The outcome of this learning experience for their career success seems, therefore, limited to the personal dimension (satisfaction, enhancement in perceived marketability). On the other hand, the respondents' career capital has been improved not only in subjective terms. There are also some objective indications of the positive results that they have achieved (in the form of projects they have managed to implement). In this context, both the comprehensive, football business specific knowledge and also networking within the restrained football environment turned out to be particularly important.

As regards the last research question, the findings of this study are in line with research in the other contexts, which demonstrates that only a part of the skills and knowledge learnt in the CPE activity is transferred into the organisation [24]. Moreover, this study reveals that there is clear evidence of heterogeneity regarding the subjective outcomes of the CPE experience for football organisations' development. In terms of the model created by Baldwin and Ford [22], the main factor differentiating the outcomes is the work environment, and particularly the organisation culture (the type of incentives used as rewards for those participating in the training and the opportunities to use the training content at work), as well as a supervisor's support. While in some institutions there is encouragement and support for implementation of innovations based on CPE experiences, in others such an approach has not been observed. And everywhere, according to the respondents, there is a margin for improvement in the management practices.

Taken together, all these findings have some practical and theoretical implications. On the practical side, the results provide evidence of the effectiveness of engaging football managers in CPE activities (as it may effectively lead to both their personal development and the development of their organisations). However, in the presence of deficiencies in learning culture in part of the sector and limited possibilities of objective benefits for the careers (like instant promotion or a salary increase), there is space for the leading organisations within the industry to create further initiatives and incentives for the CPE.

The findings of this study suggest that these initiatives should also be directed at the top managers, as this could pro-

duce the supervisor's greater support for the training transfer by the specialists and mid-managers and improve the learning culture of the organisations. In fact, UEFA has a programme directed to top managers but its accessibility is rather low. Therefore, it seems worth providing additional opportunities for both top and middle management (including sporting directors) at the national level and of more inclusive and regular nature.

Moreover, if the learning culture is so heterogeneous in the professional sector of the most commercialised sport in Poland, the situation is probably only worse in other sports and at a lower, grass root level in general. This would suggest a need for greater engagement in CPE on the part of national federations (in other sports) or state institutions and non-governmental organisations (at the grass level).

The study offers some practical hints referring to the valuable features of the content of the CPE programme for sport managers, such as a comprehensive view of the whole discipline, an insight into all management areas and different departments of sport organisations, adaptation of management practices to the local specificity, networking possibilities between representatives of clubs from the same division (as they have to cooperate to develop the whole discipline).

On the theoretical side, the study has some implications for further research. Firstly, it seems worth continuing the qualitative research in order to explore sport-related features of CPE in other disciplines and forms of CPE. Secondly, it should be complemented with the quantitative study in order to determine the scale of CPE phenomena. To this end, the scales used in the literature on motivations and outcomes of CPE should be adapted to the sport context. On the other hand, for the effective knowledge transfer into the sector through CPE, it would be useful to define the critical gaps in knowledge and skills that may exist in sport organisations.

## Conclusions

The main contribution of the study is the exploration of the football specific context of the sport managers' motivations for a continuing professional education experience, and of the outcomes of such an experience for their careers and the development of their organisations. These insights expand our understanding of the growing professionalization of the football industry. The results of the study have some practical implications for the sport stakeholders interested in the development of management processes in sport (federations, state agencies) and for the educational sector looking for expansion possibilities in the area of sport management.

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